



September 12, 2016

Coppersmith takes on position as VX-31 technical director



James Coppersmith, the technical director for Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 31 at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, stands near the AV-8B Harrier II that bears his name at China Lake. (U.S. Navy photo)

James Coppersmith describes himself as “an open book” and is proud others have labeled him a “compassionate leader.” His focus on the well-being of those in his squadron continues to be a priority as he settles into his position as the technical director for Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 31 at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division.

While Coppersmith isn’t new to VX-31, being a civilian is something he’s had to adjust to. After 23 years of service to the U.S. Marine Corps, he retired as a lieutenant colonel from his last position as officer in charge of the Marine Aviation Detachment at China Lake in May.

“I view them as my family and I’ll miss them, but I know they’re in good hands and are doing well,” Coppersmith said. “As I’m figuring out my new job, I’m finding myself getting to know the people at each of the locations since they’re all spread out. That’s one challenge that I’m really enjoying—getting out and learning what people are doing.”

A native of Ohio, Coppersmith was commissioned in 1992 following his graduation from the University of Cincinnati. Coppersmith’s first tour at NAWCWD came after his graduation from Test Pilot School in 2002 where he was assigned to MAD China Lake as an Attack



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Weapons System Officer and Operational Test Director at VX-9. In 2003, Coppersmith was reassigned to VX-31 and the AV-8B Joint Systems Support Activity as an engineering test pilot.

After reassignment to VX-31 and the AV-8B Joint Systems Support Activity, in 2005, Coppersmith was chosen by the commanding officer of VX-31 for assignment as the squadron's operations officer. A year later, Coppersmith was selected to move to the Marine Corps' Acquisition Management Primary Military Occupational Specialty assigned to the Marine Aviation Detachment Patuxent River, Maryland as the AV-8B aircraft assistant program manager for Systems Engineering and deputy program manager for the AV-8B Joint Program Office.

"I feel my career as a test pilot and acquisition professional as well as the connection I've had to the squadron really groomed me for my current position," Coppersmith said. "With quite a few Marines stationed here in the squadron, there was that tie from the MAD. I'm really glad I was able to land myself here. It's a great place to be."

One of those many ties was with former VX-31 technical director Tom Pearl, who retired in February.

"Tom Pearl and I flew together when he was the test lead for Harrier," Coppersmith said. "We knew each other back then and when he got this job, we maintained our friendship. He talked so highly of the job and when I found out he was retiring, I was hoping that I could compete for it. I hope to build on his accomplishments and keep them moving in the direction that he had."

In 2009, Coppersmith returned to China Lake as Marine Aviation Detachment China Lake executive officer and additionally as the Pacific Ranges chief test pilot and supported the NAWCWD Environmental Program manager. Roughly five years later, Coppersmith assumed command of the Marine Aviation Detachment.

"One of the most tangible missions that we have here at VX-31 is for the Search and Rescue teams who are out training and performing missions," he said. "I'm hoping to really help them further their mission through better equipment, maintenance of the equipment that they have and the training that they receive and perform out here. They're certainly a hardworking team."

Whether he's taking in the scenery by plane or on foot, Coppersmith said he has found great pleasure in exploring the landscape the area has to offer. He enjoys everything from biking and hiking to skiing. His living and working environments are two things that have kept him fascinated and wanting to stay.

"The relationships that I've formed here within the Naval Air Warfare Center, the base, and the community, I cherish them," Coppersmith said. "We can talk through the merits of the



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products that we have, but it's the people that we have that are most important. There are some really talented folks and really, really genuine people here, but getting to know them is the joy of it all."